Is Category $P$ Lexical or Functional?: A Generalized $pP$-Shell Approach

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Sungshim Hong & Xiaodong Yang. 2010. Is Category $P$ Lexical or Functional?: A Generalized $pP$-Shell Approach. *Language and Information* 14.2, 71–84. The aim of this paper is to propose that a category $P$ is encapsulated within a functional layer above the lexical layer, just like $vP$ containing a lexical $VP$. As is well known, the category $P$ has long been in the obscure domain of syntactic studies: Marantz (2001) and den Dikken (2003), for example, argue that $P$ is a lexical category, but Emonds (1985), Grimshaw (1991), and Baker (2003), maintain that the category $P$ is functional and is a closed category without its own intrinsic meaning. On the other hand, Zwart (2005) argues that it does have some meaning. Following the works of Svenoniuss (2003, 2006, 2007), and the spirit of Rizzi’s (1997) split CP hypothesis, we elaborate and develop Svenoniuss’ idea of split-$pP$ analysis with detailed schematic representations of the novel examples in English, Korean, and Chinese in this paper. Unlike Svenoniuss, however, this paper incorporates KP into $pP$-Shell, which is a substantial simplification. Furthermore, Chinese Localizers that have long been considered as Postpositions are now under the category of Prepositions. This proposal renders an X-bar theoretic consistency over the categorical status of Chinese phrasal structures. In short, the present analysis accounts for inconsistency found in English complex preposition phrase (Quirk, et al., 1972, 1985), Chinese circumposition phrase (Ernst 1988, Liu, 2002) and Korean postposition phrase in a unified and consistent manner. Furthermore, by proposing a finer-grained phrasal architecture for the category $P$, the controversial status of the category subsides within this analysis. (Chungnam National University)

Key words: adposition, circumposition, split-$P$ hypothesis, spatio-temporal relation, referential meaning, functional $P$, $pP$-shell

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1. Introduction

Adpositions whose category label can be translated into P for obvious reasons have been argued to be non-lexical. The reason behind this general agreement is mostly morphological; adpositions are closed categories so that no new adpositions have been added in the lexicon so far. Moreover, adpositions, most of them if not all, have no intrinsic meanings. Therefore, prepositions are basically Spatio-Temporal-Relational markers rather than having their own meanings.

Furthermore, the category P has been in the grey area when they come to the categorical status; one might argue that P is a lexical category (Marantz, 2001, den Dikken, 2003), whereas Baker (2003) argues, in length, that P is a functional category which lacks a derivational morphology. Zwartz (1997) indicates that all adpositions (including prepositions and postpositions) are non-lexical elements. Svenonius (2003) states that despite its association with encyclopedic information, P is essentially a functional category. Grimshaw (1991) proposes that P is a functional head in the extended projection of nouns, similar to the complementizers be the functional head in the extended projections of verbs. Emonds (1985) even argues that prepositions and complementizers are of the same functional category type. Lamontagne and Travis (1987) proposes a functional category K to bring P into it. No matter what nature K has, it is functional. The close properties that K and P make it plausible to put P into the list of functional category. What is interesting is that when we classify syntactic categories of lexical items, it seems that preposition is inductive and obscure in its nature; some prepositions seem to be devoid of intrinsic meanings, while some others seem to have some meaning. For example, Zwart (2005) states that Dutch adposition richting ‘direction, in the direction of’ has its ‘meaning.’

When we discuss whether P is lexical or functional, it is necessary to take a notion of the criteria of defining the term ‘functional.’ Along with Abney’s (1987) sense, Zwart (2005) takes functional elements to be devoid of descriptive content, but existent of Spatio-Temporal relations as their referential content. Typological study reveals that adpositions are more or less grammaticalized nouns and verbs and generally serve to link constituents (Zwart, 2005). Bearing these ideas in mind, we deem that category P should be divided into two groups: functional Ps and lexical Ps. By our understanding, lexical Ps refer to those noun-like elements (grammaticalized or cognate with nouns) indicating PLACE, whereas functional Ps refer to those simple ones which are general and all-purpose, or those that can take lexical Ps as complements. For instance, in and of in ‘in front of’ is regarded functional while front lexical. Thus, Svenonius’ (2003) proposal of “Split P hypothesis”, based on some particle constructions in Dutch following Kratzer (1996), can be extended to many other languages, including Korean and Chinese. Although Chinese Adpositional Phrases and Korean Postpositional Phrases are not exactly

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1 S.-W Kim (2009) claims, for example, that preposition ‘without’ has more semantic features than ‘with’. The word ‘without’, of course, has more semantic features than ‘with’, it has ‘NEG’ feature, if we simply speculate. He, however, has not elaborated or specified what it means for a word to have more semantic features (more “meaning”).

2 We focus on spatial adpositions mainly in this paper.